

LISTING OF THE CLAIMS

1. (Original) A computer system for providing loans to a participant having assets in a benefit plan comprising:

a processor; and

a memory operatively coupled to the processor, the memory including program data for causing the processor to perform the steps of:

initializing loan-fund information stored in a computer database upon establishment of a loan fund for the participant, the information initialized with data representing the value of funds derived from the participant's benefit-plan assets and transferred from the benefit plan upon establishment of the loan fund, wherein the loan fund is managed by an investment manager and is recorded in the benefit-plan as an asset of the participant;

generating data representing requests to the investment manager to: (i) transfer funds from the loan fund to settle redemptions made by the participant, the participant making redemptions from the loan fund by use of at least one access vehicle; or (ii) accept funds into the loan fund from the participant in repayment of redemptions; and

updating the stored loan-fund information with data representing fund transfers from and acceptances into the loan fund, whereby redemptions from and repayments to the participant's loan fund occur without access to the participant's benefit-plan assets.

2. (Original) The computer system of claim 1 further comprising a communication interface for exchanging data between the computer system and a computer system of the investment manager, and wherein the program data further causes the processor to:

update the loan-fund information upon receipt of data from the investment-manager computer system representing funds transfer from or acceptance into the loan fund; and

update the loan-fund information upon receipt of data from the investment-manager computer system representing an accrual of interest into the loan fund.

3. (Original) The computer system of claim 1 further comprising a communication interface for exchanging data between the computer system and a computer system of the benefit plan, and wherein the program data further causes the processor to:

initialize the loan-fund information upon receipt of data from the benefit-plan computer system representing establishment of the loan-fund; and

exchange status data with the benefit-plan computer system, wherein the computer system exchanges at least a representation of a current loan-fund balance, and wherein the benefit-plan computer system exchanges at least representation of limitations on the participant's redemptions.

4. (Original) The computer system of claim 1 further comprising a communication interface for exchanging data between the computer system and a settlement computer system of a settlement system that processes uses of the access vehicle, and

wherein the program data further causes the processor to generate data representing a request to transfer funds from the loan fund upon receipt of data from the access-vehicle-settlement computer system representing a request for settlement for the participant's uses of the access vehicle.

5. (Original) The computer system of claim 4 wherein the program data further causes the processor to:

receive data from the access-vehicle-settlement computer system representing a proposed redemption to be made by a participant's proposed use of the access vehicle;

generate data to the access-vehicle-settlement computer system representing an authorization of the proposed redemption only if the proposed redemption is less than or equal to a line of credit (LOC) value; and

generate data to the access-vehicle-settlement computer system representing a refusal of the proposed redemption only if the proposed redemption is greater than the LOC value.

6. (Original) The computer system of claim 5 wherein the LOC value does not exceed an available loan amount (ALA) value determined in accordance with statute, regulation, or policy in dependence on the participant's benefit-plan assets, wherein the determination preserves a tax-advantaged treatment of the participant's redemptions.

7. (Original) The computer system of claim 5 wherein the program data further causes the processor to:

receive data from the access-vehicle-settlement computer system representing at least one redemption by the participant made by a use of the access vehicle; and

update data representing the LOC value in response to the received data by decreasing the LOC value by the total value of the redemptions.

8. (Original) The computer system of claim 1 further comprising a communication interface for exchanging data between the computer system and a computer system of a funds-acceptance provider, wherein the program data further causes the processor, upon receipt of data from the funds-acceptance-provider computer system representing the participant's payment of funds to the funds-acceptance provider, to generate data representing a request for acceptance of funds into the loan fund.

9. (Original) The computer system of claim 1 wherein the access vehicle includes a check, or a credit card, or a debit card, or an ACH transfer, or a wire transfer, or a sweep, or an ATM.

10. (Original) The computer system of claim 1 wherein the program data further causes the processor to generate data representing loan-fund statement information for informing the participant of required repayment amounts and times.

11. (Original) The computer system of claim 10 wherein the required repayment amounts and times are determined in dependence on the total redemptions that have not yet been repaid and in accordance with statute, regulation, or policy to preserve tax-advantaged treatment of the participant's redemptions.

12. (Original) The computer system of claim 10 wherein the generated data is transmitted to the participant by means of the Internet network or a telephone network.

13. (Original) The computer system of claim 1 wherein the program data further causes the processor, upon receipt of data representing a participant request, to generate data representing loan-fund status for informing the participant of recent redemptions, or loan-fund balance, or required repayments.

14. (Original) The computer system of claim 1 wherein the generated data is periodically transmitted as messages grouped into computer files.

15. (Original) A computer-implemented method for providing loans to a participant having assets in a benefit plan comprising:

initializing loan-fund information stored in a computer database upon establishment of a loan fund for the participant, the information initialized with data representing the value of funds derived from the participant's benefit-plan assets and transferred from the benefit plan upon establishment of the loan fund, wherein the loan fund is managed by an investment manager and is recorded in the benefit-plan as an asset of the participant;

generating data representing requests to the investment manager to: (i) transfer funds from the loan fund to settle redemptions made by the participant by use of at least one access vehicle; or (ii) accept funds into the loan fund from the participant in repayment of redemptions; and

updating the stored loan-fund information with data representing fund transfers from and acceptances into the loan fund, whereby redemptions from and repayments to the participant's loan fund occur without access to the participant's benefit-plan assets.

16. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 15 wherein the loan-fund information comprises data representing at least a loan-fund balance.

17. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 16 wherein loan-fund balance is updated in response to receipt of data from the investment-manager computer system representing funds transfer from or acceptance into the loan fund.

18. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 16 further comprising the steps of:

generating data for the benefit-plan computer system representing the current loan-fund balance for the benefit plan; and

receiving data from the benefit-plan computer system representing the limitations on the participant's redemptions.

19. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 15 further comprising a step of generating data representing a request for acceptance of funds into the loan fund from a funds-acceptance provider in response to receipt of data representing the participant's repayment of funds to the funds-acceptance provider.

20. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 15 further comprising a step of receiving data representing settlement requests from a settlement system that processes uses of the access vehicle, and wherein data representing requests to transfer funds from the loan fund to settle redemptions is generated in response to receipt of request data from the access-vehicle-settlement system.

21. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 20 further comprising the steps of:

receiving data from the access-vehicle-settlement computer system representing at least one redemption by the participant made by a use of the access vehicle; and

updating data representing an LOC value in response to the received data by decreasing the LOC value by the total value of the redemptions that have not been repaid.

22. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 20 further comprising the steps of:

receiving data from the access-vehicle-settlement system representing a proposed redemption to be made by a participant's proposed use of the access vehicle;

generate data to the access-vehicle-settlement system representing an authorization of the proposed redemption only if the proposed redemption is less than or equal to a line of credit (LOC) value; and

generate data to the access-vehicle-settlement system representing a refusal of the proposed redemption only if the proposed redemption is greater than the LOC value.

23. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 22 wherein the LOC value does not exceed an available loan amount (ALA) value determined in accordance with statute,

regulation, or policy in dependence on the participant's vested benefit-plan assets, wherein the determination preserves a tax-advantaged treatment of the participant's redemptions.

24. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 16 wherein the loan-fund balance is further updated in response to receipt of data from the investment-manager computer system representing a repayment or a fee posted to the loan fund.

25. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 15 further comprising a step of generating data representing loan-fund statement information for informing the participant of required repayment amounts and times.

26. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 25 wherein the required repayment amounts and times are determined in dependence on the total redemptions that have not yet been repaid and in accordance with statute, regulation, or policy to preserve tax-advantaged treatment of the participant's redemptions.

27. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 15 wherein the access vehicle includes a check, or a credit card, or a debit card, or an ACH transfer, or a wire transfer, or a sweep, or an ATM.

28. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 15 wherein the generated data is periodically transmitted as messages grouped into computer files

29. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 15 wherein loans are provided to a plurality of participants, each participant having assets in the benefit plan.

30. (Previously amended) A program product comprising a computer readable medium having encoded program data for causing a computer to perform a method for providing loans to a participant having assets in a benefit plan comprising the steps of:

initializing loan-fund information stored in a computer database upon establishment of a loan fund for the participant, the information initialized with data representing the value of funds derived from the participant's benefit-plan assets and transferred from the benefit plan upon establishment of the loan fund, wherein the loan fund is managed by an investment manager and is recorded in the benefit-plan as an asset of the participant;

generating data representing requests to the investment manager to: (i) transfer funds from the loan fund to settle redemptions made by the participant by use of at least one access vehicle; or (ii) accept funds into the loan fund from the participant in repayment of redemptions; and

updating the stored loan-fund information with data representing fund transfers from and acceptances into the loan fund, whereby redemptions from and repayments to the participant's loan fund occur without access to the participant's benefit-plan assets.

31. (Currently amended) A computer-implemented method for providing loans to a participant having assets in a benefit plan comprising:

establishing a loan fund for the participant;

transferring funds from the benefit plan to the ~~lead~~ loan fund, wherein transferred funds are derived from the participant's benefit-plan assets, and wherein the loan fund is managed by an investment manager and is recorded in the benefit-plan as an asset of the participant;

upon request to the investment manager, providing funds from the loan fund to settle redemptions made by the participant, the participant making redemptions from the loan fund by use of at least one access vehicle; and

upon request to the investment manager, accepting funds into the loan fund from the participant in repayment of redemptions;

updating stored loan-fund information with data representing fund transfers from and acceptances into the loan fund, whereby redemptions from and repayments to the participant's loan fund occur without access to the participant's benefit-plan assets.

32. (Original) The method of claim 31 wherein the step of establishing further comprises requesting the benefit plan to transfer funds to the loan fund.

33. (Original) The method of claim 31 wherein the value of the funds transferred from the benefit plan is less than the value of participant's vested assets in the benefit plan.

34. (Original) The method of claim 31 wherein the participant's benefit-plan assets further comprise a stock, or a bond, or a mutual fund share, or a money market fund share, or a bank deposit, or a financial instrument.

35. (Original) The method of claim 31 wherein the access vehicle includes a check, or a credit card, or a debit card, or a wire transfer, or an ACH, or a sweep, or an ATM.

36. (Original) The method of claim 31 wherein the participant makes a plurality of redemptions from the loan fund by a plurality of uses of the access vehicle.

37. (Original) The method of claim 31 further comprising a step of authorizing a participant's proposed redemption from the loan fund only if the total of the proposed redemption and past redemptions that have not yet been repaid is equal to or less than an available line of credit (LOC) value determined for the participant.

38. (Original) The method of claim 37 wherein the LOC value is equal to or less than an available loan amount (ALA) value which depends upon the value of the participant's vested assets in the benefit plan.

39. (Currently amended) The method of claim 31 wherein the loan fund further comprises information representing a loan-fund balance, and further comprising the steps of:

updating the loan-fund balance by: (i) increasing the balance upon receipt of funds transferred from the benefit plan or repaid by the participant, and (ii) decreasing the balance upon transfer of funds for settlement of redemptions or transfers to the benefit plan ; and

sending periodically to the benefit plan information representing the current loan-fund balance.

40. (Original) The method of claim 39 wherein the information periodically sent to the benefit plan further represents the value of the amounts due from the participant.

41. (Original) The method of claim 31 wherein the loan-information is further updated when the investment manager accrues into the loan fund dividends earned on the loan fund or interest paid by the participant on redemptions from the loan fund.

42. (Currently amended) The method of claim 31 wherein the steps of establishing, or requesting funds transfer from, or requesting funds acceptance into the loan fund are performed in accordance with statute, regulation, or policy to preserve tax-advantaged treatment of the participant's redemptions.

43. (Original) The method of claim 42 wherein the statute, regulation, or policy includes one or more of the provisions of 26 U.S.C. §§ 1 and 401 *et seq.*, and 29 U.S.C. § 1001 *et seq.* and any other similar programs.

44. (Original) The method of claim 31 wherein, upon establishment, the loan fund is structured as a sub-custodian or a sub-trust of the benefit plan.

45. (Original) A computer system for providing loans to a participant having assets in a benefit plan comprising:

computer processor means;

computer database means operatively coupled to the computer processor means;

program means for causing the processor means to initialize loan-fund information representing a loan-fund balance stored in the computer database means upon establishment of a loan fund for the participant, the information initialized with data representing the value of funds derived from the participant's benefit-plan assets and transferred from the benefit plan upon establishment of the loan fund, wherein the loan fund is managed by an investment manager and is recorded in the benefit-plan as an asset of the participant;

program means for causing the processor means to generate data representing requests to the investment manager to: (i) transfer funds from the loan fund to settle redemptions made by the participant; or (ii) accept funds into the loan fund from the participant in repayment of redemptions; and

program means for causing the processor means to update the stored loan-fund information with data representing fund transfers from and acceptances into the loan fund, whereby redemptions from and repayments to the participant's loan fund occur without access to the participant's benefit-plan assets.

46. (Original) The computer system of claim 45 further comprising:

program means for causing the processor means to generate data for the benefit-plan computer system representing the current loan-fund balance for the benefit plan, and

program means for causing the processor means to receive data from the benefit-plan computer system representing the limitations on the participant's redemptions.

47. (Original) The computer system of claim 45 further comprising program means for causing the processor means to generate data representing a request for acceptance of funds into the loan fund from a funds-acceptance provider in response to receipt of data representing the participant's repayment of funds to the funds-acceptance provider.

48. (Original) The computer system of claim 45 further comprising program means for causing the processor means to receive data representing settlement requests from a settlement system that processes uses of an access vehicle, and wherein data representing requests to transfer funds from the loan fund to settle redemptions is generated in response to receipt of request data from the access-vehicle-settlement system.

49. (Original) The computer system of claim 48 further comprising:

program means for causing the processor means to receive data from an access-vehicle-settlement computer system representing at least one redemption by the participant made by a use of the access vehicle; and

program means for causing the processor means to update data representing an LOC value in response to the received data by decreasing the LOC value by the total value of the redemptions that have not been repaid.

50. (Original) The computer system of claim 48 further comprising:

program means for causing the processor means to receive data from the access-vehicle-settlement system representing a proposed redemption to be made by a participant's proposed use of the access vehicle;

program means for causing the processor means to generate data to the access-vehicle-settlement system representing an authorization of the proposed redemption only if the proposed redemption is less than or equal to a line of credit (LOC) value; and

program means for causing the processor means to generate data to the access-vehicle-settlement system representing a refusal of the proposed redemption only if the proposed redemption is greater than the LOC value.

51. (Original) The computer system of claim 45 further comprising program means for causing the processor means to generate data representing loan-fund statement for informing the participant of required repayment amounts and times.

52. (Currently amended) The system of claim 8 wherein the program data further causes the processor to:

receive data from funds-acceptance-provider computer system representing at least one ~~payment~~ re-payment by the participant; and

update data representing the LOC value in response to the received data by increasing the LOC value by the value of the ~~payment~~ re-payment.

53. (Original) The computer system of claim 3 wherein the program data further causes the processor to generate data representing a transfer to the participant's benefit-plan assets of accrued interest paid by the participant on redemptions from the loan fund.

54. (Original) The computer system of claim 3 wherein the program data further causes the processor to generate data representing a transfer to the participant's benefit-plan assets of accrued dividend funds earned on the loan fund.

55. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 15 further comprising updating the loan-fund information in response to receipt of data from the investment-manager computer system representing posting of (i) interest paid by the participant on redemptions from the loan fund, or (ii) of dividends earned on the loan fund.

56. (Original) The computer-implemented method of claim 55 further comprising generating data representing a transfer of an interest paid or a dividend earned to the participant's benefit plan assets.

57. (Previously amended) The method of claim 41 further comprising, upon request to the investment manager, transferring accrued dividend and interest funds from the loan fund to the benefit plan.

58. (New) A computer system for providing loans to a participant having assets in a benefit plan account, said benefit plan account of said participant comprising a plurality of investments including an investment in a loan fund, said computer system comprising a computer-readable memory with instructions capable of performing steps comprising:

receiving information reflecting a loan request for a loan-request amount made by said participant;

verifying that said loan-request amount does not exceed a current balance in said loan fund as indicated by account information for said loan fund, said account information for said loan fund being stored by said computer system separately from account information for said benefit plan;

transferring said amount of funds requested by said participant loan request from said loan fund if said loan-request amount has been verified to not exceed said current balance in said loan fund; and

updating said account information for said loan fund to reflect said amount of funds transferred from said loan fund.

59. (New) The computer system of claim 58 wherein said loan fund comprises stable-value assets having a stable market value.

60. (New) The computer system of claim 59 wherein said stable-value assets comprise cash or cash-equivalent instruments.

61. (New) The computer system of claim 58 further performing steps comprising:
receiving information reflecting a repayment made by said participant;
transferring the amount of funds repaid by said participant into said loan fund; and
updating said account information for said loan fund to reflect said amount of repaid funds transferred into said loan fund.

62. (New) The computer system of claim 58 further performing steps comprising:
receiving information reflecting a request made by said participant to transfer an amount of funds into said loan fund from said benefit plan account;
transferring said amount of funds requested by said participant transfer request into said loan fund from said benefit plan account; and
updating said account information for said loan fund to reflect said amount of funds transferred into said loan fund.

63. (New) The computer system of claim 58 further performing steps comprising:
receiving information reflecting a request made by said participant to transfer an amount of funds from said loan fund into said benefit plan account;
transferring said amount of funds requested by said participant transfer request from said loan fund into said benefit plan account; and
updating said account information for said loan fund to reflect said amount of funds transferred from said loan fund.

64. (New) The computer system of claim 58 wherein at least one loan request is made by use of a payment access vehicle by said participant.

65. (New) The computer system of claim 64 wherein said payment access vehicle comprises a check, or a credit card, or a debit card, or an ACH transfer, or a wire transfer, or a sweep, or an ATM.

66. (New) The computer system of claim 58 further performing steps comprising administering said benefit plan account by updating in said account information for said benefit plan the value of said benefit-plan investment in said loan fund, said updated value reflecting said current balance in said loan fund.

67. (New) The computer system of claim 58 further performing steps comprising updating said account information for said loan fund to reflect accrual of interest into said loan fund.

68. (New) The computer system of claim 58 further performing steps comprising receiving, from an administrator/processor of said benefit plan account, information reflecting a maximum total amount of loans from said loan fund that can be outstanding to said participant, wherein said maximum amount of loans is determined in dependence on a current value of said assets in said benefit plan account.

69. (New) The computer system of claim 68 further performing steps comprising determining a line of credit for said loan fund, said line of credit not exceeding either said maximum amount of loans or said current balance in said loan fund.

70. (New) The computer system of claim 69 wherein said step of verifying further comprises verifying that said loan-request amount does not exceed said line of credit.

71. (New) The computer system of claim 69 wherein said step of updating further comprises updating said line of credit to reflect said amount of funds transferred from said loan fund.

72. (New) The computer system of claim 58 wherein said step of receiving further comprises receiving information from a payment-settlement system reflecting at least one loan-request; and wherein the loan-request amount of said loan request reflects payments made by said payment-settlement system consequent to a use or to uses of a payment access vehicle by said participant.

73. (New) The computer system of claim 72 further performing steps comprising:
receiving information from said payment settlement system reflecting at least one proposed use of said payment access vehicle by said participant; and

sending information to the payment settlement system reflecting approval/rejection of said proposed use if the amount of said proposed use is less than/greater than a current line of credit for said loan fund.

74. (New) The computer system of claim 58 further performing steps comprising transmitting information reflecting said current balance in said loan fund to an administrator of said benefit plan account.

75. (New) A computer system for providing loans to a participant having assets in a benefit plan account, said benefit plan account of said participant comprising a plurality of investments including an investment in a loan fund, said computer system comprising a computer-readable memory with instructions capable of performing steps comprising:

receiving information reflecting a loan request for a loan-request amount made by said participant;

verifying that said loan-request amount does not exceed a current balance in said loan fund as indicated by account information for said loan fund, said account information for said loan fund being stored by said computer system separately from account information for said benefit plan; and

sending information reflecting rejection of said loan request if said loan request has not been verified because said loan-request amount exceeds said current balance in said loan fund.

76. (New) The computer system of claim 75 wherein said loan fund comprises stable-value assets having a stable market value.

77. (New) The computer system of claim 76 wherein said stable-value assets comprise cash or cash-equivalent instruments.

78. (New) The computer system of claim 75 further performing steps comprising:
receiving information reflecting a repayment made by said participant;
transferring the amount of funds repaid by said participant into said loan fund; and
updating said account information for said loan fund to reflect said amount of repaid
funds transferred into said loan fund.

79. (New) The computer system of claim 75 further performing steps comprising:
receiving information reflecting a request made by said participant to transfer an amount
of funds into said loan fund from said benefit plan account;
transferring said amount of funds requested by said participant transfer request into said
loan fund from said benefit plan account; and
updating said account information for said loan fund to reflect said amount of funds
transferred into said loan fund.

80. (New) The computer system of claim 75 further performing steps comprising:
receiving information reflecting a request made by said participant to transfer an amount
of funds from said loan fund into said benefit plan account;
transferring said amount of funds requested by said participant transfer request from said
loan fund into said benefit plan account; and
updating said account information for said loan fund to reflect said amount of funds
transferred from said loan fund.

81. (New) The computer system of claim 75 wherein at least one loan request is made by
use of a payment access vehicle by said participant.

82. (New) The computer system of claim 81 wherein said payment access vehicle comprises a check, or a credit card, or a debit card, or an ACH transfer, or a wire transfer, or a sweep, or an ATM.

83. (New) The computer system of claim 75 further performing steps comprising administering said benefit plan account by updating in said account information for said benefit plan the value of said benefit-plan investment in said loan fund, said updated value reflecting said current balance in said loan fund.

84. (New) The computer system of claim 75 further performing steps comprising updating said account information for said loan fund to reflect accrual of interest into said loan fund.

85. (New) The computer system of claim 75 further performing steps comprising receiving, from an administrator/processor of said benefit plan account, information reflecting a maximum total amount of loans from said loan fund that can be outstanding to said participant, wherein said maximum amount of loans is determined in dependence on a current value of said assets in said benefit plan account.

86. (New) The computer system of claim 85 further performing steps comprising determining a line of credit for said loan fund, said line of credit not exceeding either said maximum amount of loans or said current balance in said loan fund.

87. (New) The computer system of claim 86 wherein said step of verifying further comprises verifying that said loan-request amount does not exceed said line of credit; and

wherein said step of sending further sends information reflecting rejection of said loan request if said loan request has not been verified because said loan request amount exceeds said line of credit.

88. (New) The computer system of claim 75 wherein said step of receiving further comprises receiving information from a payment-settlement system reflecting at least one loan-request; and wherein the loan-request amount of said loan request reflects payments made by said payment-settlement system consequent to a use or to uses of a payment access vehicle by said participant.

89. (New) The computer system of claim 88 further performing steps comprising:
receiving information from said payment settlement system reflecting at least one proposed use of said payment access vehicle by said participant; and
sending information to the payment settlement system reflecting approval/rejection of said proposed use if the amount of said proposed use is less than/greater than a current line of credit for said loan fund.

90. (New) The computer system of claim 75 further performing steps comprising transmitting information reflecting said current balance in said loan fund to an administrator of said benefit plan account.